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ABSTRACT

This profile in outline form of the English teaching situation in Denmark discusses the role of English in the community and within the educational system. The general educational system is described, as well as means of assessing proficiency in English, the syllabi and textbooks used for English instruction, English for Special Purposes, and English instruction for adults. The make-up of the teaching cadre and instructional materials other than books are dealt with, as are English instruction outside the public educational system and British and American support for the teaching of English. A general statement concerning the strengths and weaknesses of the English language instruction situation concludes the profile, along with a brief mention of current research. (CLK)

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ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING PROFILE

COUNTRY: Denmark

July 1975

1. The Role of English

English has been a major foreign language in Denmark for some time. It is studied widely and is now generally regarded as the principal second language of the country.

1.1 English is not the medium of instruction at any level in the educational system.

1.2 English as a subject has a prominent place in the educational system and is the first foreign language to be studied.

1.3 English is not normally used as a means of communication between nationals, though many people, especially in Copenhagen, can speak English fluently.

1.4 However, English is used as a means of communication in international situations and within international organisations working in Denmark. It is generally accepted, at present, to be the main international language for politics, commerce, medicine, technology and higher education.

2. English within the Educational System

Education is compulsory between the ages of 7 and 16 years. After the first 7 years in the Folkeskole, a pupil can either spend 3 years in the academic stream (Realskole), or 2 or 3 years in vocational classes. The system also provides for 3 years in a Gymnasium (Grammar School) overlapping one year with the Realskole, or 2 years in less academic preparation for higher education. This complicated school pattern is best understood by the diagram on page 2.

2.1 School education is provided in state schools, county schools and government-aided private schools, all operating under general state regulations, though considerable local autonomy in matters of detail is allowed. English is compulsory (between 3 and 5 hours per week, varying with the year) from the 5th year of schooling, and remains so up to the end of the Realskole, but can be dropped from the 8th year if a pupil follows the vocational stream. In the Gymnasium it is compulsory (4 hours a week) in the first year, and remains so for most arts subjects, but can be dropped from the second year by mathematics and science students.

At the 7th year, German as an additional foreign language is introduced but it is only compulsory for one year unless the pupil is going on to Realskole.

This elaborate pattern of language teaching is due to be changed in August 1976 under legislation already passed.

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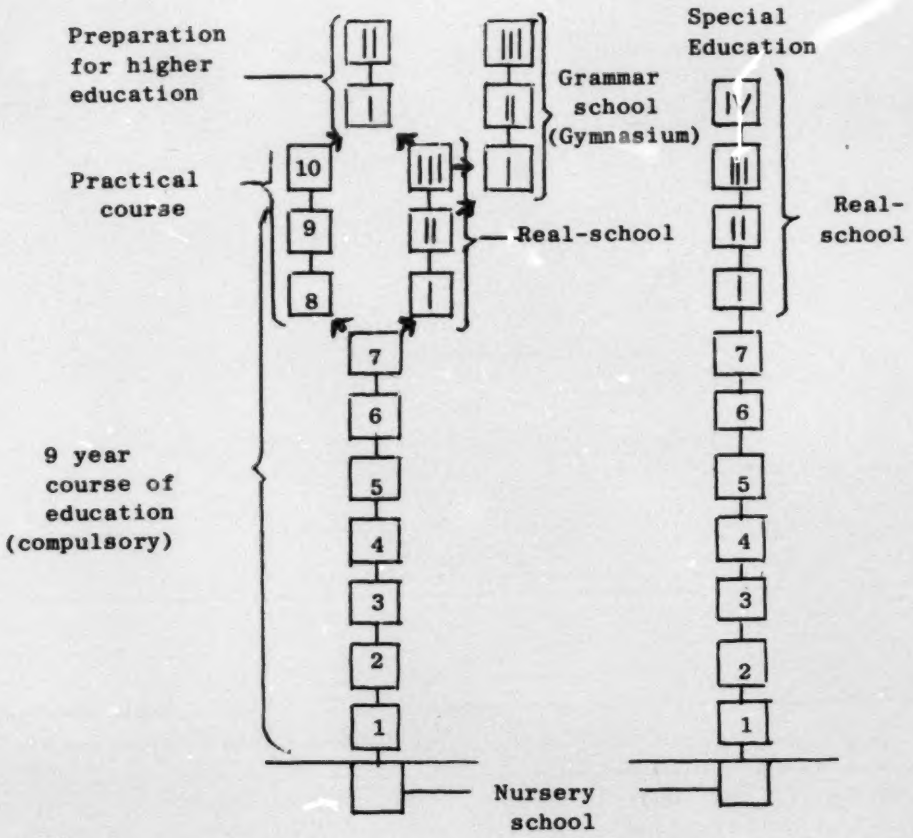

2.3 Examinations in the primary school, and in the first 2 years of Realskole, are internally set and marked, with moderation from external censors. The Realeksamen and the Studentereksamen, taken at the end of 3 years of Realskole and 3 years of Gymnasium respectively, are external examinations. The Studentereksamen qualifies for university entrance.

Translation still forms part of these examinations. The Realeksamen includes the reproduction of a passage read aloud, and guided composition. In the Studenterkesamen aspects of intensive and extensive reading are tested, and this is based on chiefly literary texts. Both examinations include an oral test.

2.4 Success in English examinations is of some importance in the educational system. Promotion from the Realskole is to the Gymnasium, and the securing of a place at the University depends upon examination. A modern language is essential in the Realskole and for most sections of the Gymnasium, and English is chosen by most candidates.

2.5 Both syllabus and textbooks are partly controlled by central government regulations and by external examination requirements. A detailed syllabus is not prescribed by the central government, but in the Gymnasium, for

example, regulations stipulate that a certain number of pages must be read intensively and a certain number extensively, and the choice of titles is vetted by Ministry of Education advisers. With general limits, however, the course is devised and textbooks chosen by the individual teacher, sometimes in consultation with his pupils. At an elementary level most teachers use course books written by their Danish colleagues but at higher levels paperbacks without annotation are often used.

Heads of Departments do not exist in Danish schools but in practice senior teachers often act in this capacity.

2.6 There is an inspectorate of a part-time advisory nature for primary and secondary schools. Experienced teachers, not necessarily from Copenhagen, are attached to the local Directorate to act, usually for a 3-year period, as part-time advisers in their subjects.

2.7 English for Special Purposes is still undeveloped in Denmark, except at tertiary level in the modern language faculties of the schools of Economics and Business Administration (Handelshøjskoler). These offer degrees in specialised language (legal, commercial, technical etc) and assist Government departments in running occasional language courses for specialised purposes. Degrees from these schools are taken by translators and interpreters.

2.8 The idea of self-improvement through Education was vigorously promoted by the life and work of Bishop Grundtvig (1789-1878) an educational pioneer of enormous influence. From him springs the idea that it is never too late to undertake new learning. Adult education, accordingly, is greatly encouraged by the Government. Those who have left school after the 10th form can undertake a further 2 years in the Højere Forberedelseskursus (HF) which may qualify for university entrance. Language study, particularly English, is one of the subjects taught. The majority of adult education, however, is unconnected with qualifications and undertaken by citizens of all ages in evening classes during the winter. These are run by local government authorities, by educational societies, by political parties, and by independent associations, all with generous government financial support. English Language is a popular subject. The standard of teaching varies greatly and some of the teachers have no specialised language teaching training. Many students study for the examinations held in Denmark for the Cambridge University Syndicate - Lower Certificate, Proficiency and Diploma.

3. Teaching Cadres

By comparative British standards teaching is a well paid profession and there is no indication of any shortage of teachers; indeed there is some unemployment amongst them. Teachers in certain subjects, however, are from time to time in short supply. Up to date statistics of employment are not available.

3.1 There are few expatriate British (or American) teachers of English, and most of them are employed at the tertiary level. In schools virtually all teachers of English are Danish.

3.2 All teachers have either a pedagogic or a university academic qualification: teachers at the Folkeskole (including Real classes) have studied at a teacher training college (seminarium). Gymnasium teachers have a university degree in 2 subjects.

3.2.1 Teachers intended for Folkeskole will enter their seminarium after 6 or 7 years of English study. During their 4 years at the seminarium they will study a wide range of subjects and become specialists. Not all teachers of English will have specialised in English but this is now less common than before. Seminarium-trained teachers can proceed to a degree in education at the Royal Danish School of Educational Studies (Lærerhøjskolen). This degree combines knowledge of their school subject with study of psychology and educational theory.

3.2.2 Gymnasium teachers of English are graduates who have often, but not always, taken English as their main subject. Students spend at least 6 years as undergraduates before taking their first degree (Cand.Mag.). On first appointment to a school they are placed on probation for 6 months during which time they teach under supervision and also attend some theoretical lectures in education.

3.3 Further training in English Language Teaching is possible through special courses offered from time to time by the universities, the Ministry of Education and the British Council. In-service courses are also arranged periodically with universities in Britain or the USA by one of the three professional language teachers organisations. These are:

Seminariernes Engelsklærerforening (SELF)
Gymnasieskolernes Engelsklærerforening
and Forening af Folkeskolelærere i fremmede sprog (SPROGSAM)

They are the Associations of Language Teachers in the Seminaria, the Gymnasia, and the Folkeskoler respectively.

4. Teaching Materials

Being a small and relatively affluent country, with a long tradition of effective foreign language study, Danish predictably does not suffer from a lack of teaching materials. By world standards Denmark has no shortage of textbooks or other ELT materials.

4.1 The general pattern is one of diversity of materials, governed by a general uniformity of aims and method. Individual teachers choose textbooks for their own classes. Teachers can obtain guidance and help in Skolecentraler (Teachers' Centres), one in each county. These vary considerably but the best have a wide selection of ELT textbooks and printed materials.

4.2 At elementary level teachers usually use books written by Danes, possibly supplemented by background reading material often produced in Britain. At Gymnasium level, since the aim is to develop an insight into characteristics of the culture as well as a proficiency in the language, English authors are more often selected. American literature must also be represented in the syllabus.

4.3 Apart from books, many of the usual audio-visual aids to language teaching are to be found in Danish schools and colleges of education - records, tapes, tape recorders, overhead projectors, film strips and sometimes language laboratories. Because English is the main language of "Pop", some teachers use Pop singers' records in their classes. Nevertheless language teaching in Denmark can be said to rely heavily on the printed

textbook. Danmarks Radio has programmes of English literature for children but no ELT courses or lessons as such.

4.4 There is no project specifically related to the production of ELT materials. Many teachers produce their own materials at their local Skolecentral (Teachers' Centre). The centres have been established in every county and some have excellent facilities for producing simple materials.

5. English Outside the Educational System

There are many private Schools of English and private teachers of English in Denmark offering a great variety of courses, Berlitz being perhaps the biggest. These schools and private teachers are used chiefly by business executives who are about to be posted abroad, or have assumed new responsibilities and find their school English inadequate. Several Schools in England (members of either ARELS or FELCO) have agents in or send representatives to Denmark to publicise their courses and these are well patronised. Some of the larger commercial houses in Denmark (eg Carlsberg and Magasin du Nord) have English language teachers in their staff training departments to provide regular and specialised English teaching. There are English language classes on Danish radio and TV from time to time and the prevalence of British films and British TV programmes in the cinemas and on Danish Television certainly helps adults to keep up the English which they have learnt in school.

6. British Support for the Teaching of English

British support for ELT is peripheral to routine school teaching and higher education. There is no English language expert in the Council post in Denmark. Some support is given, however, through vacation courses for teachers of English and the loan of tapes and books from the Council Library.

6.1 The Council's regular Language and Literature Summer Courses in Britain are advertised in Denmark and fairly well patronised. Until last year (when the course was cancelled) a biennial course for primary and secondary teachers was run by the Council in conjunction with the Danish-British Society. For this the Council provides a Director of Studies and 3 lecturers. There are also shorter courses (1-5 days) from time to time, for which the Council recruits British teachers.

6.2 There are no British teachers recruited through the Council and no VSOs. A dozen guest teachers are recruited annually by the CBEVE as English teachers on behalf of the Danish Ministry of Education. They are not necessarily trained teachers of English.

6.3 Recordings of Shakespeare and the major poets and ELT tapes are available to teachers of English from the British Council Library and are in frequent use. 'What to Say', 'Realistic English' and 'Listening Comprehension' are recent additions.

6.4 Documentary and feature films from the British Council are used in connection with English teaching in universities, secondary schools and adult education classes. Technical colleges have used 'The Scientist Speaks' series. Four sets of 'View and Teach' have been presented to the State Film Centre.

7. American Support for the Teaching of English

Book presentations have been made by the American Government to University Departments of English, as well as class sets of works of American literature to some Gymnasia.

USIS run 4 weekend seminars each year in American Studies, including American literature.

8. General Statement

At first sight the strength of English Language Teaching in Denmark is considerable. The language is compulsory from the fifth standard for at least 3 years and for the academic pupil it is in practice an essential part of his curriculum until the university is reached. Denmark is economically very dependent on Britain and cultural ties and sympathies are strong. English has a natural advantage as an international language and most Danes who occupy top positions in politics, business or the learned professions speak English. The Danish language borrows extensively from English.

But on closer examination the position is less satisfactory. English, naturally, is not used at all in domestic communication between Danes. Though many language teachers are devoted, expert and up to date, many others have no specialist language teaching skills and some are extremely traditional. The freedom given to individual teachers to choose their textbooks, admirable in theory, often results in texts being used unchanged for too long. The English Departments of the three older universities, and particularly Copenhagen, still have a strong philological bias. The University course itself demands a minimum of 6 years study for the first degree, which inevitably results in a very high (60%) drop-out rate. The great popularity of adult language classes suggests the limitations of school and university teaching of English. Moreover the great financial strength of a near neighbour (Germany), manifested in TV coverage of much of Denmark, and in a growing tourist trade, provides a linguistic competitor.

9. Current Research and Bibliography

Oscar Nielsen The Teaching of English in Denmark. ELT Vol XXIII No 2 January 1969

Publications of the Council of Europe

Papers by D C Christiansen.